

# Differentiating Instruction (Online!) for Equity in Learning

Teachers know that no two students are the same.

In this webinar, we will:

- explore the concept of differentiated instruction, which aims to ensure all learners are given opportunities to succeed, taking into account their backgrounds, academic experiences, learning styles, and interests
- examine a variety of practical differentiation strategies that can help us meet the diverse needs of students
- discuss ways to adapt these classroom practices for online learning settings



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE



# Chloe Bellows



Chloe has 14 years of English teaching experience in public, private, and community schools, from primary through university and adult levels.

In 2019, she served as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in João Pessoa, Brazil, where she led professional development for public school English teachers and collaborated on program development for a public bilingual middle school.

Chloe is from the United States and lives in Argentina. She holds a BA in Comparative Literature from Brown University and an MA in TESOL/Applied Linguistics from Teachers College, Columbia University.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE



# Differentiating Instruction (Online!) for Equity in Learning



© 2021 by Chloe Bellows. *Differentiating Instruction (Online!) for Equity in Learning* for the American English Live Teacher Professional Development Series, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. government and administered by FHI 360. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, except where noted. To view a copy of the license, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

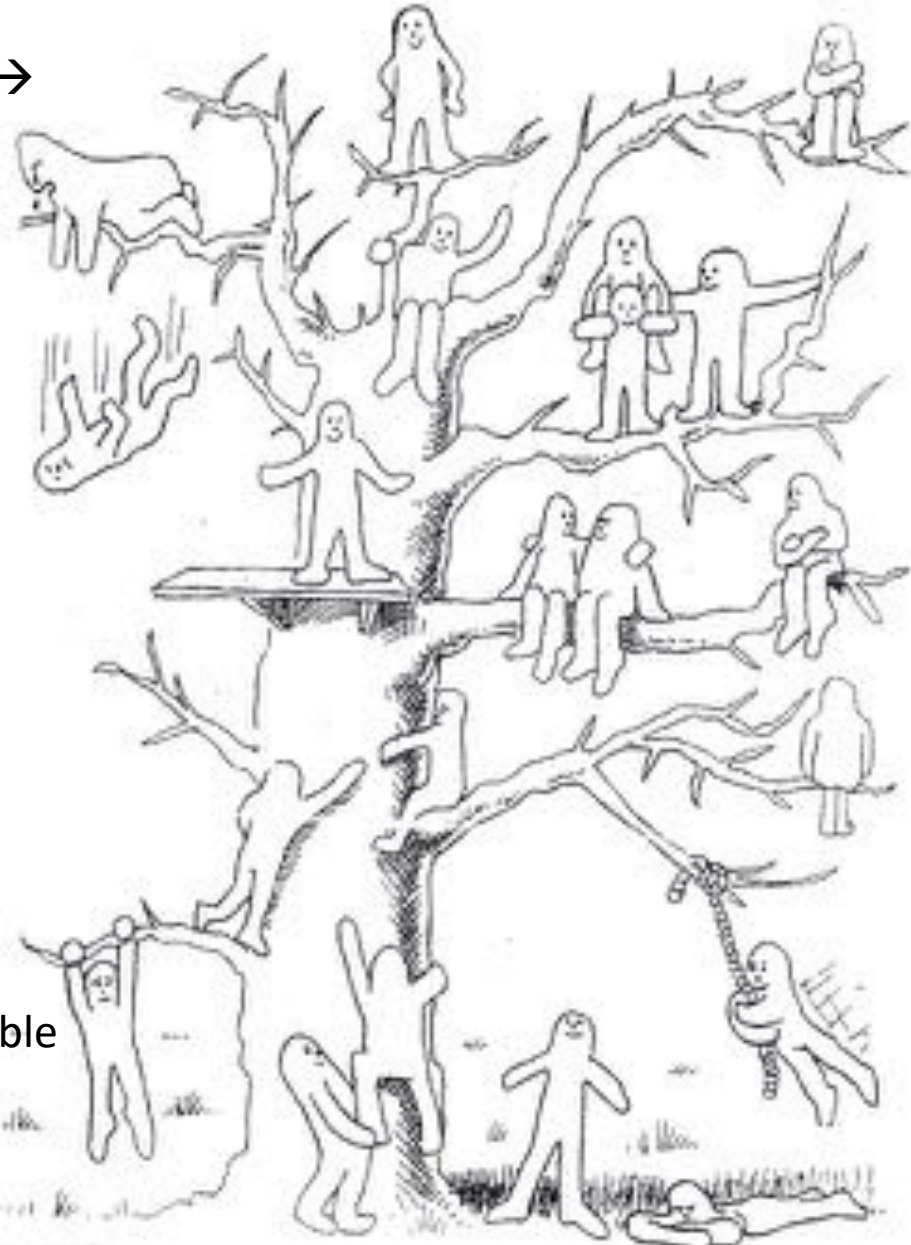
# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts



# The Blob Tree of Learning

Very comfortable →



Not very comfortable →

***Silent Reflection:***  
How comfortable do you  
feel with differentiated  
instruction?

***Where are you on the tree?***

Source: [www.blobtree.com](http://www.blobtree.com)



# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. **Thinking about our learners**
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts



# How are our learners unique?



Think about the learners in your class.

***How are they unique and different from one another?***



# How are our learners unique?

Prior school experience



Family life



Interests

Race



Sexual orientation

Gender



Skills

Religion



Hardships



"Multiple Intelligences (Writing III, 2008, males)" by pabeaufait is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Languages at home



# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
- 2. Differentiation: Why is it important?**
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts



**So, no two learners are the same...**



**...and no two learners learn in the same ways.**

**“Fair doesn’t always mean equal.”**

*What does this mean to you?*





Image: Sylvain Kalache, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sylvainkalache/33437897130>



# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
- 3. Differentiation: What is it?**
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts



# Differentiated Instruction: Definitions

**“At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.”**

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000, p. 1)

# Differentiated Instruction: Definitions

**“Every teacher who has entered a classroom has differentiated instruction in one way or another. Teachers differentiate when they give a student more time to finish an assignment, allow children choice in what they read, give different types of assessments, and myriad other ways...[It] is a set of strategies that will help teachers meet each child where they are when they enter class and move them forward as far as possible on their educational path.”**

Holli M. Levy (2008, p. 161)

# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. **Online: Challenges and opportunities**
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts





What challenges have you faced  
teaching online?

What has been positive about it?



# Online! What teachers are saying

## *Challenges and opportunities*

Engaging children and supporting them in the learning process online can be **challenging**, especially those who do not connect.

I don't create my content, so I can't control that or differentiate it too much.

Online makes differentiating more difficult, because you aren't with the students for long and it's hard to get to know them. **On the other hand**, online teaching is **very flexible**, which helps with differentiation. Allowing students to **express their learning in different ways** and learn more about **things they are curious about** is a benefit of online teaching.



# Online! What teachers are saying

## *What works*

To get to know each student, **despite the distance**, we held individual student-teacher meetings and also always **let students stay after on Zoom** classes if they want.



I try to keep **classes dynamic with fun activities** like movie days or Zoom tea parties. Also, **empathy** is so important, asking students how I can support them.

Students **can be "tech tutors."** This boosts their confidence and motivates them. I use **online classrooms** a lot more now. It's helps keep track of student work and is nice to able to access it whenever from wherever. **I'll hold onto that practice.**

*Thanks to: Jenna Ellsworth, Lucy Stefano, Kyle Bellows, Chris Mason and Katrina Schmidt, the teachers quoted here.*

# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts





# The Process of Differentiation

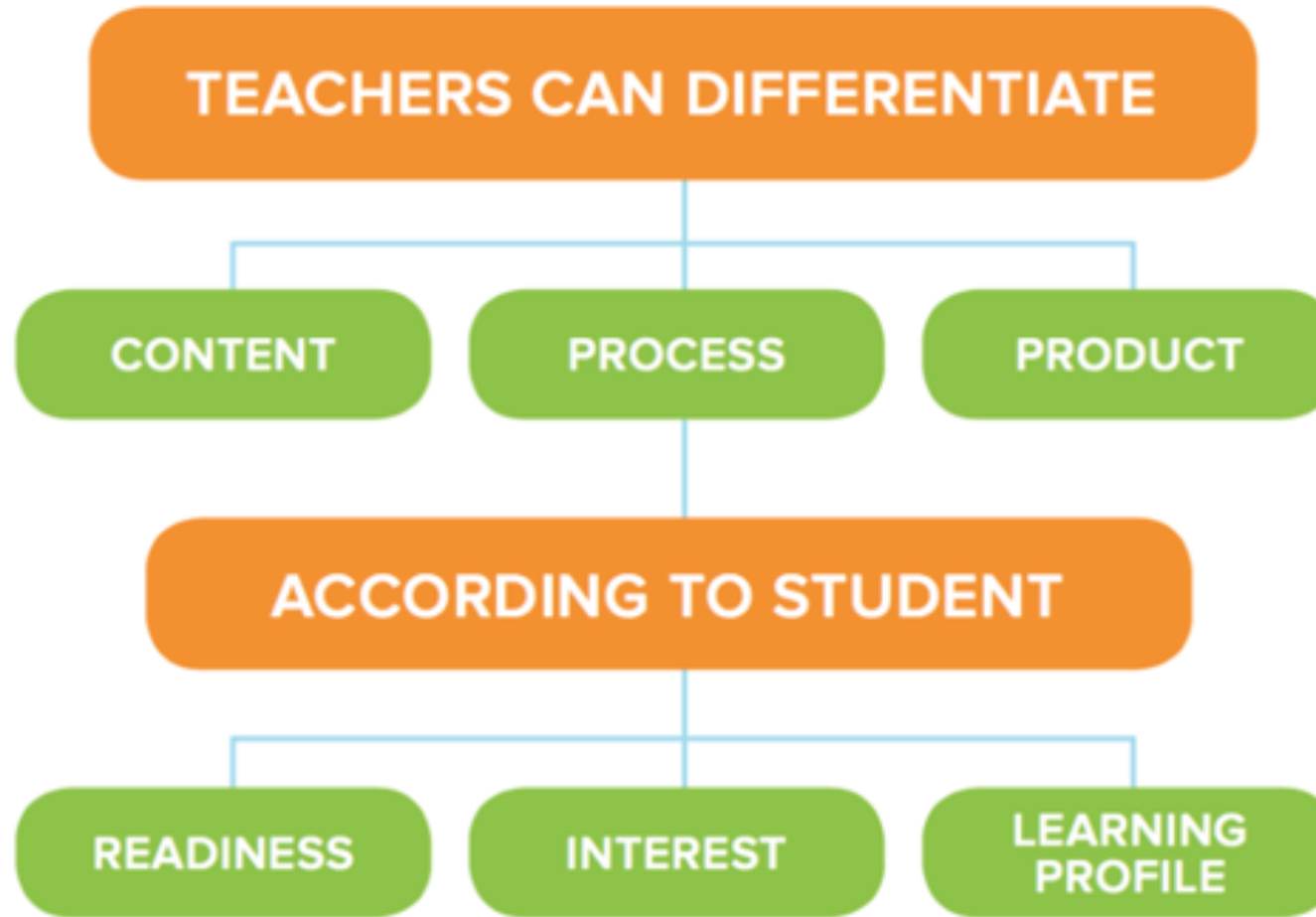
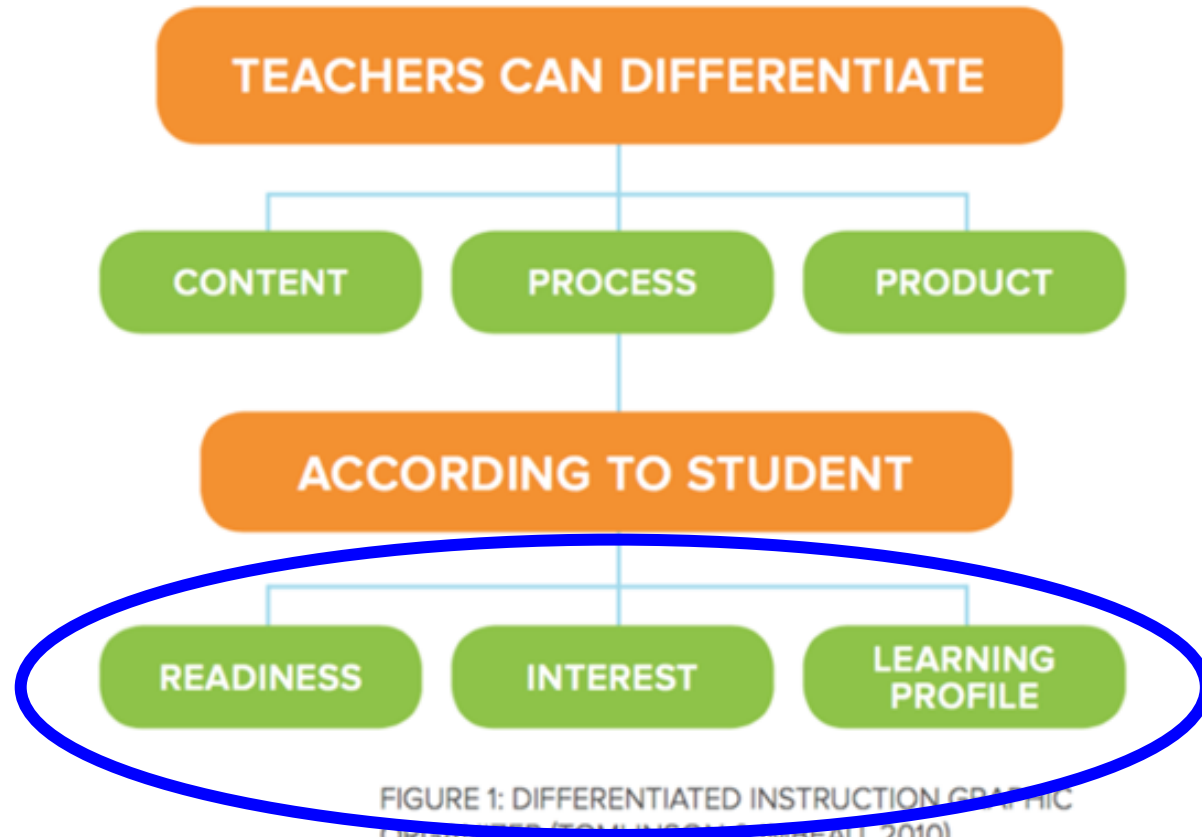


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

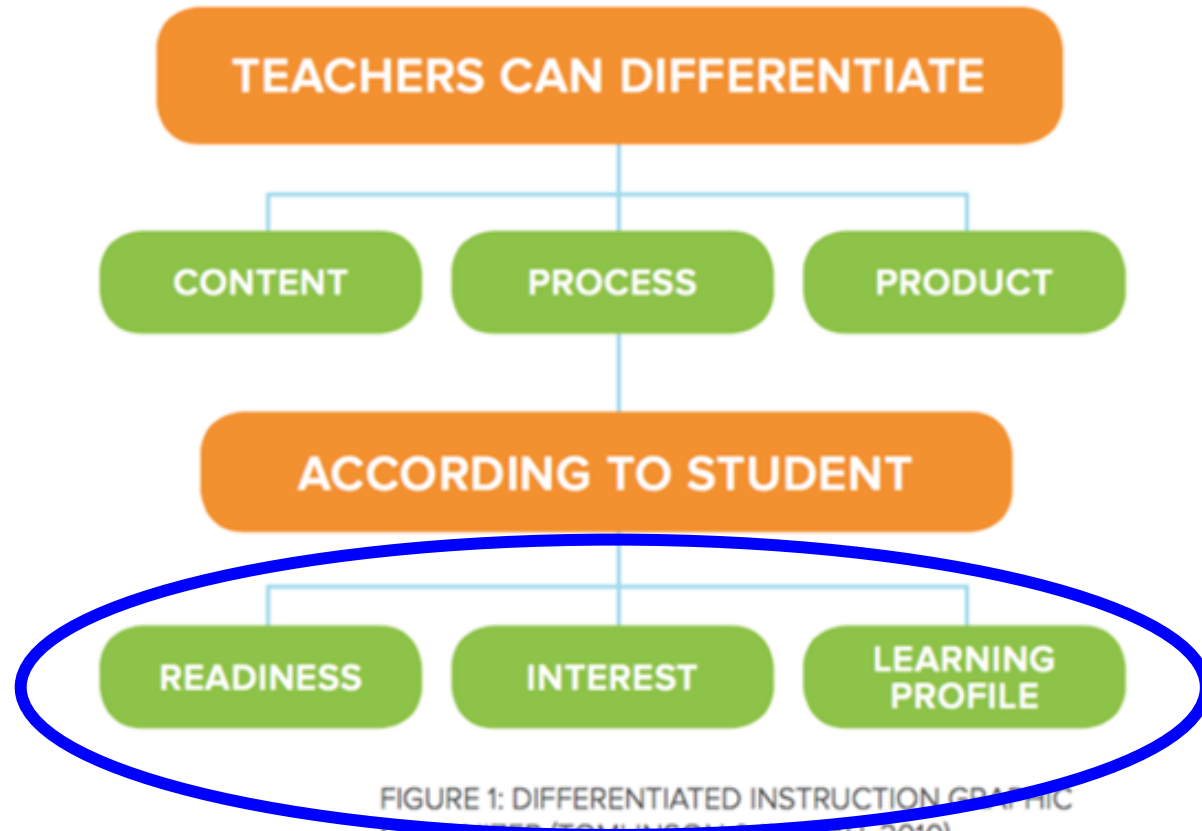
# First, learn about our learners



*What are some ways you learn about your learners?*



# First, learn about our learners



- Interviews
- Surveys / forms
- Family histories
- School histories
- Observations
- Assessments

# Back to School form

## *Surveys or Forms*

- Student or family
- Answers automatically go into a spreadsheet
- Look back through year
- Helps student self-reflect mid-year, end of year

The screenshot shows a digital form titled "A note to my Y6 teacher". At the top, there are tabs for "QUESTIONS" (which is selected and underlined) and "RESPONSES" (with a count of "16"). Below the title, a welcome message reads: "Hello! Welcome to Year 6C! I am excited to be working with you this year, and want to get to know you better. Please answer these questions." The form contains four questions, each with a red asterisk indicating it is required:

- My name: \***  
Short answer text
- Today I feel.... \***  
Long answer text
- I am excited about Year 6 because: \***  
Long answer text
- I am nervous about Year 6 because: \***  
Long answer text

Something I want my teacher to know about me is: \*

Long answer text

Sometimes I need help to ....

Long answer text

I learn best when I work \*

- ☐ in groups
- ☐ in pairs
- ☐ alone

I like to learn using \*

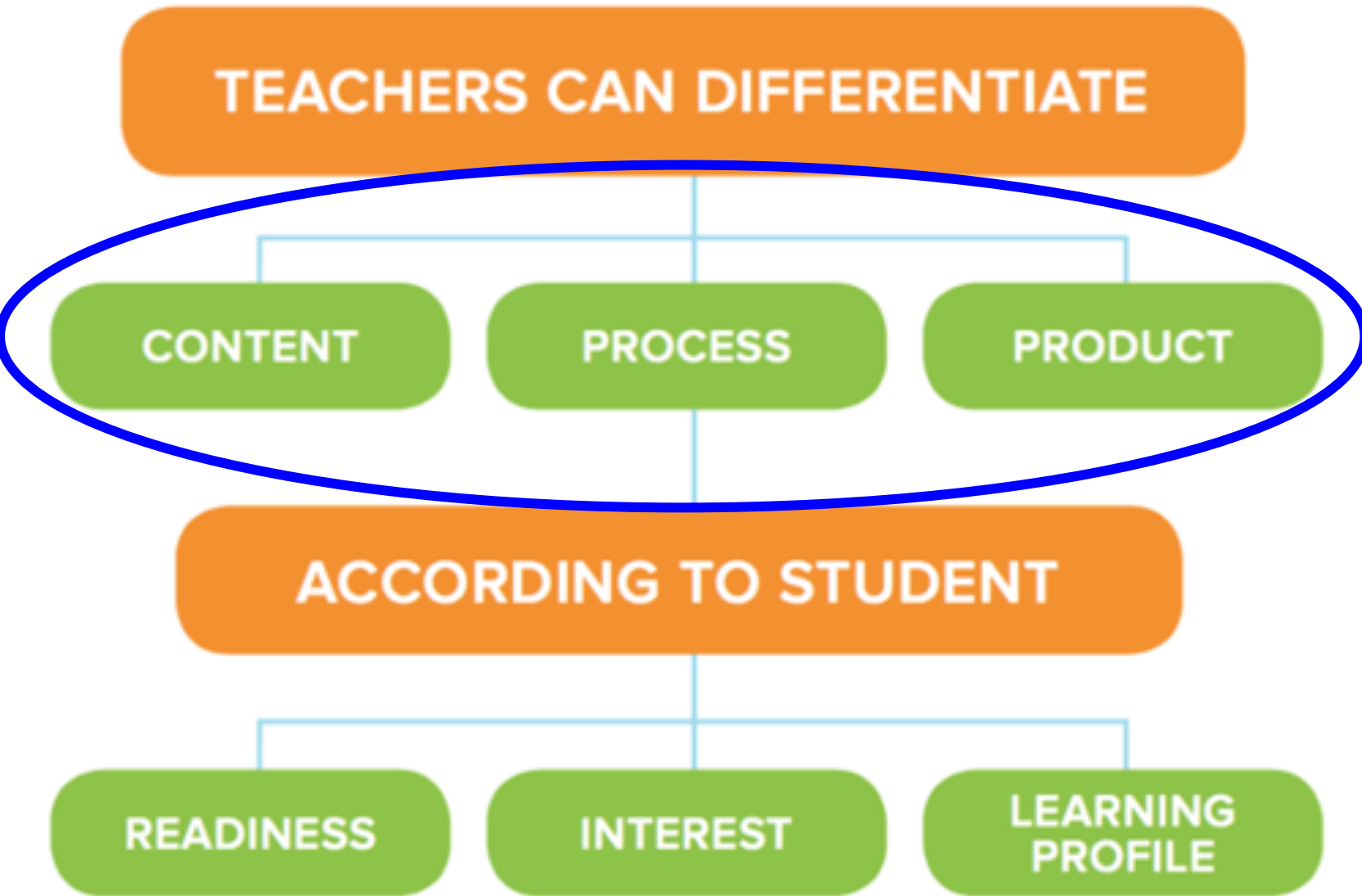
- ☐ technology
- ☐ art
- ☐ music
- ☐ writing

# More questions to ask learners...

- What is your favorite thing to do on the weekend?
- What language do you speak at home with your family?
- Do you like working in groups, with a partner, or alone?
- Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
- Where do you do your homework?
- Who do you ask for help with your homework?
- Do you like to do homework in silence or with music?
- What's something you're really good at?
- Does anything about school make you nervous?
- What time do you usually go to bed?







**How can we differentiate?**

FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

# Ways to differentiate



CONTENT



**WHAT is to be learned**

*e.g. Let students choose the topic*



PROCESS



**HOW, WHERE, WITH WHOM students learn**

*e.g. Vary grouping, or seating arrangements*



PRODUCT



**HOW students DEMONSTRATE learning**

*e.g. Let students choose the type of final project*

How do you currently differentiate in  
your class—by **Content, Process,**  
and/or **Product?**



# Content: What is to be learned

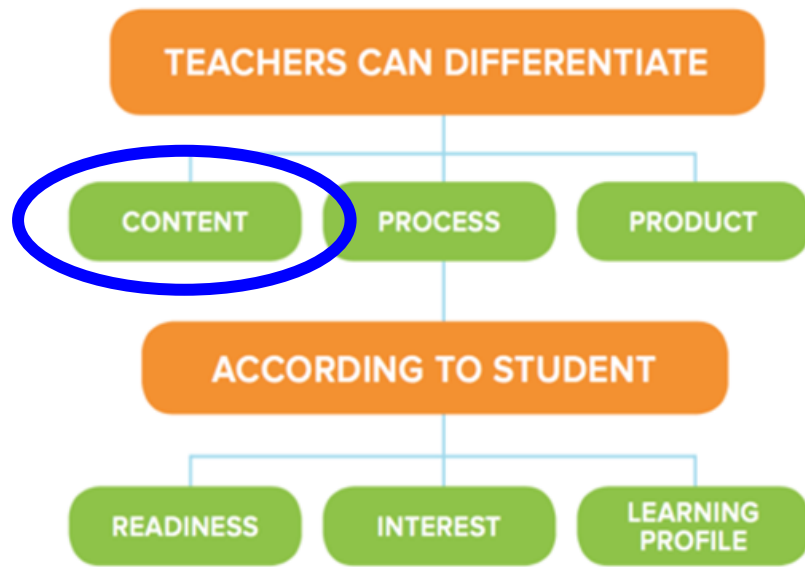


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

- Give **choice** of topic based on interest (within curriculum also)
- Respond to **student feedback** and make changes
- Use **multiple forms of input** (realia, demonstrations, videos, books, photos, podcasts)
- Vary content based on **student level**
- Vary **tasks and supports** based on student preparedness (word banks, sentence starters)

# Content: What is to be learned

## Tic-Tac-Toe: Give students choices

Learning about **recycling**: choose which to research

What can schools do to help recycle? <hr/>	Which countries have the highest rates of recycling?	What are some materials you can recycle?
How can people recycle more at home?	What is the local government's role in recycling?	What happens to the materials we recycle?
How can your city or town improve its recycling?	What percent of our plastics get recycled?	What are some products being made out of recycled materials?

Tic-Tac-Toe (Passive Voice)

Write	Saw	Drive
Discover	Steal	Break
Kick	Move	Explain

# Content: What is to be learned

## Writing a persuasive letter

Students **choose** an issue they feel strongly about in their town or city and write a letter to someone in government explaining the issue and what should be changed.



## Book report

Students **choose** the book they want to read (or teacher can give them three choices). The assignment is still the same, but the content they're using is interesting and personally motivating.



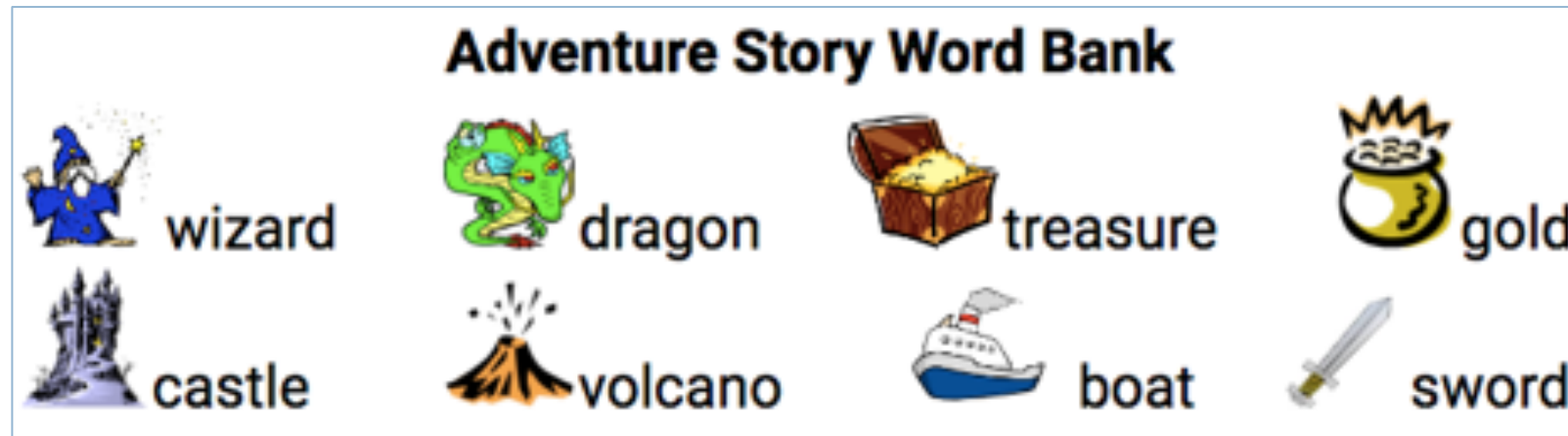
# Content: What is to be learned

## Supports: Given by teacher

- Leveled content for different groups (length, difficulty)
- All receive same text/image, different questions (can already be in a shared doc)

## Supports: Optional for students

- Provide a word bank (in a separate doc) that students can use if they want.
- Give sentence starters or frames that are optional.



# Content: What is to be learned

*New York Times: What's Going On in This Picture?*

Building

Fire

Watching

Smoke

Kids

Playing



<https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture>

# Content: What is to be learned

**Group 1:** What is happening in this picture? Name 5 things.

**Group 2:** What happened before this picture was taken? Explain why you think so.

**Group 3:** Explain what's happening in this picture and what could have been done differently.



<https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture>

# Process: How, where, with whom students learn

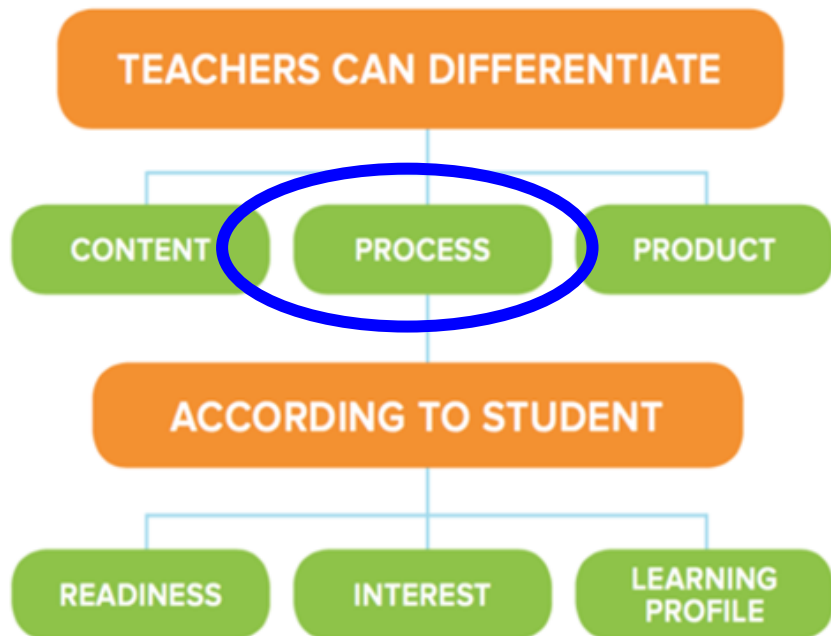


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

What are some ways you differentiate **process** in your classes (online or in-person)?



# Process: How, where, with whom students learn

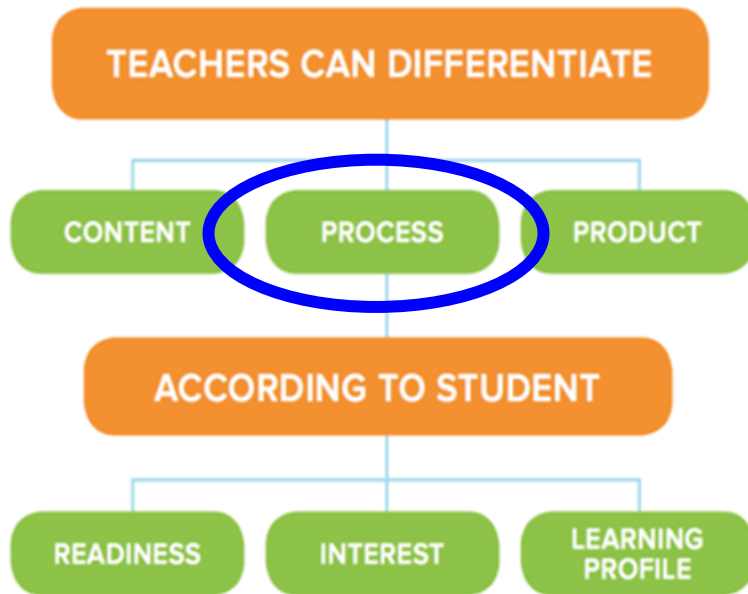


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

- **(HOW)** Give material in advance to pre-read or divide into small parts
- **(HOW)** Allow for more time / breaks
- **(WHERE)** Flexible seating / flexible sync & async
- **(WITH WHOM)** Grouping: same or mixed ability (teacher-selected or student-selected), with different levels of teacher support for different group
- **(WITH WHOM)** ZOOM breakout rooms - great for grouping!
  - Different assignments per room



# Process: How, where, with whom students learn

## Flexible seating and movement

*Flexible seating is about more than simply having a variety of different, fun seats in the classroom. It's about utilizing student voice, creating buy-in, heightening collaborative learning, and prioritizing students' needs concerning the environment in which they learn. (Markle, 2018)*



"High School ELA flexible seating. Full classroom.  
Canton Galva Schools! 2018-19" by LauraGilchristEdu  
is licensed under CC BY 2.0



# Process: How, where, with whom students learn



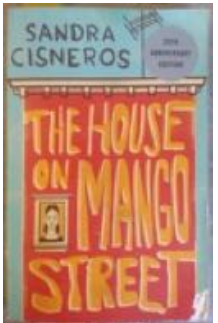
## ***Student Profile: Valentina, 16 yo***

**Teacher Observation and Survey:** Shy, likes working with one partner, needs more time reading, but has strong comprehension. With support, she is developing oral fluency.

**Class Plan:** Reading and discussion of a chapter “My Name” (2 pages) in *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros

### **Process and Differentiation:**

- ✓ Before class: Give Valentina and five other students the text to pre-read
- ✓ Whole class discussion: Before reading, ask Valentina “Do you like your name?”
- ✓ Zoom breakout room: Group Valentina with Marcos, work in shared doc with discussion questions and sentence starters
  - ✓ “Why does Esmeralda want a different name?” *She wants a different name because...*



# Product: How students demonstrate learning

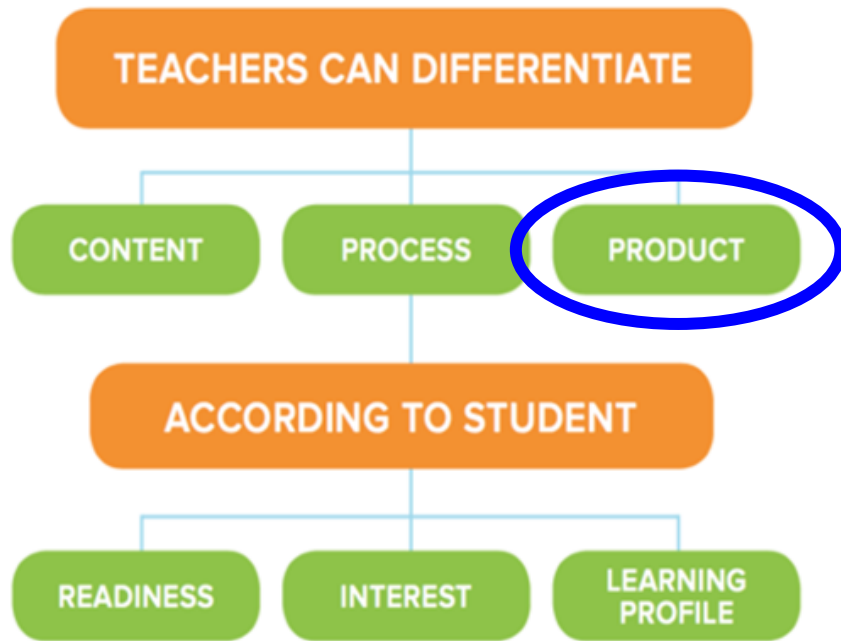


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

## Let students choose how to show their learning

- Choice between questions in assessment
- Essay
- Poem
- Oral report/presentation
- Drawing with caption
- Song lyrics

*Next time, they have to choose a different type of product.*

# Product: How students demonstrate learning



- **Different roles and responsibilities** in group work and presentations
- **Challenge students** with more responsibility (Leading discussions, researching at home, being the teacher for the day)
- **Vary questioning** for oral responses (Ask one student the color of his shirt, ask another student why she chose to wear that color.)

Success means different things for different students!

# Product: How students demonstrate learning

## Free response



Imagine, we're going to watch a short video about climate change in our Zoom class together.

After, you'll have **5 minutes to respond** however you choose - **drawing, an audio recording, writing, notes, a poem, mind map...**

*How would **you** respond?*



# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
- 6. Helpful resources**
7. Final thoughts



# Resources to help with differentiation

## Leveled texts online:

- Voice of America: <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/>
- Breaking News English: <https://breakingnewsenglish.com/>
- News ELA: [www.newsela.com](http://www.newsela.com)

**Google Classroom:** Assignments or questions for certain students only.

**Youtube:** use closed captioning and subtitles.  
Download videos beforehand.





# Today's Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
- 7. Final thoughts**



# Differentiation: Summary and Key Concepts

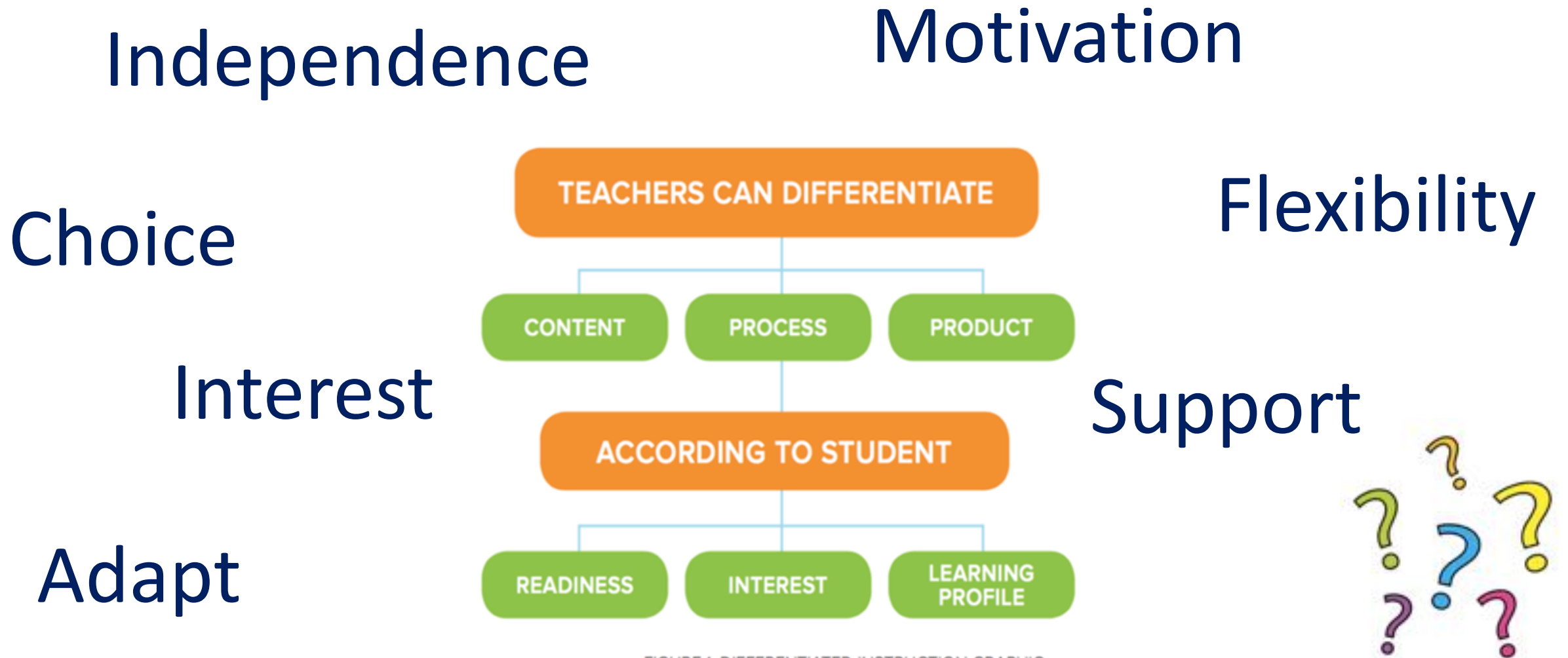
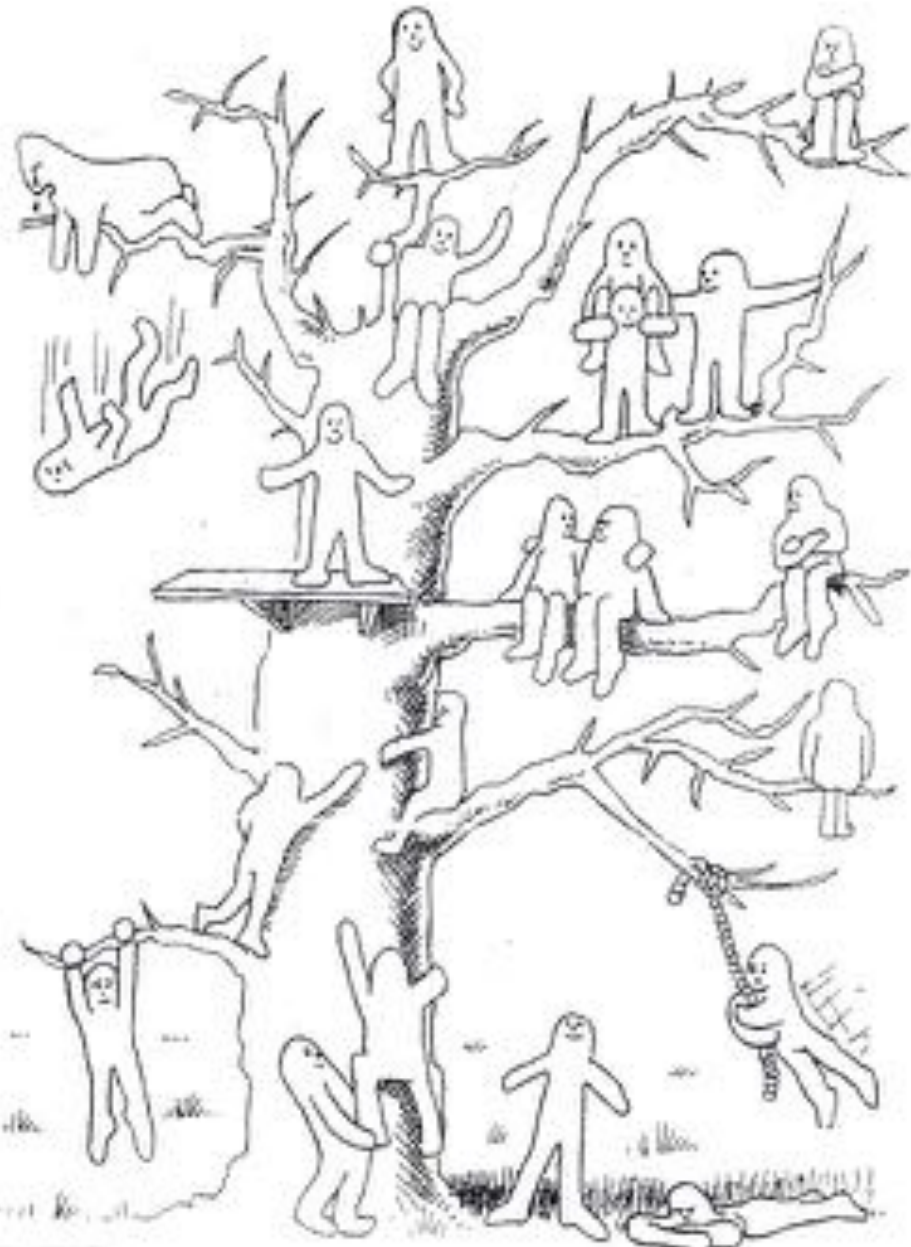


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

# The Blob Tree of Learning



***Silent Reflection:***  
How comfortable do you  
feel with differentiated  
instruction?

***Where are you now?***

# Reflection: Exit Cards! (Zoom version!)



1.



I used to think ...

Now I think ...

***OR***

2.

Write one differentiation strategy you want to try in your class.



**Thank you!!**



# References

- Differentiated Instruction: It's Not as Hard as You think (Video). (2018, Sept 11). Retrieved from [https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching\\_now/2018/09/differentiating\\_instruction\\_its\\_not\\_as\\_hard\\_as\\_you\\_think\\_video.html](https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2018/09/differentiating_instruction_its_not_as_hard_as_you_think_video.html)
- Differentiation and the Brain: A Discussion with Carol Ann Tomlinson. (2013, June 30). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLzCqoPFxRw>
- Levy, Holli M. (2008) Meeting the Needs of All Students through Differentiated Instruction: Helping Every Child Reach and Exceed Standards. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 81:4, 161-164, DOI: 10.3200/TCHS.81.4.161-164
- Markle, Brooke (2019) Reflections on shifting to a flexible classroom. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/reflections-shifting-flexible-classroom#:~:text=Flexible%20seating%20is%20about%20more,environment%20in%20which%20they%20learn.>
- Thousand, Jacqueline & Nevin, A & Villa, R. (2007). Differentiating Instruction. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.
- Tomlinson, Carol A. (2000) Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades. ERIC Digest. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED443572.pdf>
- Tomlinson, C., & Imbeau, M. (2010). Leading and managing a differentiated classroom. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- "Multiple Intelligences (Writing III, 2008, males)" by pabeaufait is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 retrieved from <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/c7aab4ad-8df6-42f2-bb4f-00721b2b218c>
- "High School ELA flexible seating. Full classroom. Canton Galva Schools! 2018-19" by LauraGilchristEdu is licensed under CC BY 2.0  
"Retrieved from <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/b8e15d6f-bee7-4062-a270-b033a494df92>

***Unless otherwise noted, all images in this presentation are the author's own or are "no-attribution required" under the [Pixabay simplified license](#) or the [Unsplash license](#).***



# Thank you!

---

Email: [americanenglishwebinars@fhi360.org](mailto:americanenglishwebinars@fhi360.org)

AE Live - Ning Community of Practice: [americanenglishwebinars.com](http://americanenglishwebinars.com)

AE for Educators Facebook page: [facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators](https://facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators)

AE website: [americanenglish.state.gov](http://americanenglish.state.gov)

AE YouTube channel: [youtube.com/StateAmericanEnglish](https://youtube.com/StateAmericanEnglish)

AE Facebook page: [facebook.com/AmericanEnglishatState](https://facebook.com/AmericanEnglishatState)



# Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the ways that your students differ from one another? Do you already differentiate your instruction to address these differences? If so, how?
2. What choices might you offer your students about how they learn and what they produce to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in virtual learning settings?
3. What are the key takeaways from this session that you might apply in your classroom?



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

